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RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHROV #0119/01 2131410
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 011410Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0780
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0810

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000119

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE STATEMENTS RAISE EYEBROWS

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[¶1.](#) (SBU) Summary. Two Vatican documents released last month caused consternation among ecumenists and inter-religious dialogue experts. While the Church sees these as internal matters that are fully explainable within the Catholic context, the world at large is increasingly attuned to such pronouncements and inclined to want fuller explanations. End summary.

Tridentine Mass

[¶2.](#) (U) Pope Benedict XVI's July 7 letter authorizing expanded use of the pre-Second Vatican Council Tridentine Mass (sometimes, casually but misleadingly, referred to as the Latin Mass) sought to regulate an internal church matter. However, it gained an inter-religious dimension when Jews complained about the inclusion of prayers, in the Tridentine rite for Good Friday, which seek their conversion and acceptance of Jesus Christ as their savior.

[¶3.](#) (U) The Tridentine rites used on Good Friday contain prayers for the conversion of Jews, asking God to lift the veil from their hearts and to free them from blindness. These prayers reflect the historical context of the rite, which was promulgated in 1570. Originally even more offensive, with Jews described as "perfidious," the prayers were toned down in 1962. The modern post-Tridentine version of the Good Friday rite still contains a prayer for Jews, but also -- more benignly -- refers to them the first people to hear the word of God and prays they will continue to "grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant." It is this prayer that reflects the current doctrinal position of the Catholic Church regarding Jews. If the Tridentine rite causes too much irritation we expect a new directive on the use (or not) of the offending Good Friday prayers. Indeed, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Secretary of State (second only to the Pope), has already suggested that the language could be modified.

"Subsists in"

[¶4.](#) (U) Complaints came from the ecumenical sphere when a clarification about the nature of the Catholic Church was issued July 10 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the Vatican's office for doctrinal matters. The statement that the true church of Jesus Christ "subsists" in the Catholic Church drew fire from Protestants, who objected to the conclusion that their congregations thus could not properly be known as churches. The Orthodox, though not subject to this latter indignity, also complained about the Vatican's "arrogance." The Russian Orthodox said somewhat dryly that they appreciated the robust nature of the statement, as it showed clearly where the Catholic Church stood.

¶5. (U) The "subsists in" language, which defines the Catholic Church as the fullest expression of the church of Jesus Christ, reflects a self-understanding unique to Catholicism. During the Second Vatican Council sessions in the 1960s, there was much debate on whether the church of Jesus Christ "is" the Catholic Church, or "subsists in" the Catholic Church. The latter, more restrained, term won out. Other Christian communities, according to the bishops attending the Council, contain some elements of the church of Jesus Christ, but not as completely as in Catholicism. The Vatican also says Protestant communities are not "churches" in the way Catholicism defines the term, because they lack essential elements such as a direct lineage of bishops to the early apostles (elements which are present for Orthodox Christians). After the July 10 statement was released, many Protestants disputed the exclusiveness of the Catholic claim; the Vatican's ecumenical relations czar, Cardinal Walter Kasper, noted in response that the statement says nothing new, being part of Catholic doctrine for some 40 years. The July statement's "corrective" quality was aimed solely at Catholics who had strayed from the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and not at Christians of other denominations.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) The fallout from the two documents reflects the continued sensitivity of other faiths to theological matters which the Holy See prefers to consider strictly internal. True, both can legitimately be described as internal and unsurprising within the Catholic context (though both have provoked some dissent within the faith as well); but the Vatican remains slow to appreciate the fact that today's Papal statements and documents do in fact get noticed outside the Church by people who tend to feel affected by that language. We will look in a future report at the Holy See's communications office, in considerable need of a modernized approach; one key area would be the ability to anticipate reactions from the world at large to "internal" matters like those described above, and to form a

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strategy for explaining them more clearly.
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